

Only five more weeks to go



JACK CLIFFORD

Just one more Emerald to go. My daily mantra for the past several weeks has been a variation on that sentence: "Twenty-two Emeralds to go" ... "Thirteen to go" ... "Only six to go." Now, the penultimate issue has arrived, and my final Ol' Dirty Emerald as editor in chief is on deck for publication Monday.

The one-year stint at the paper's helm has come as my higher education career nears its end, so this is supposed to be the proverbial "What I learned while in college ... p.s. to the returning students: See ya' later, suckers" column. (Before my schooling officially concludes, however, I have to somehow cram 18 credits into the first four weeks of the summer school term; then I'll have my bachelor's degree in sociology and it's on to Austin, Texas.)

Not to imply that college has been a breeze, but being editor in chief of the Emerald was arguably the biggest challenge of my life. The highs and lows sometimes seemed to alternate hour by hour. Despite a fever-graph perception of the experience, though, I can say that taking on the responsibility was the right choice to make.

But back to the "What I learned..." part of the essay. Honestly, it's difficult to write about my education without thinking of my job experiences with various newspapers. I've worked at newspapers for about one-third of my life, including several years in Florida at

an independent publication, two years at The Torch, Lane Community College's paper, and two and a half years at the Emerald.

In the past 12 months as the Emerald editor in chief, I've learned that a person's education is so much more than listening to lectures and following syllabi. I've learned patience with the Emerald staff when confronted with mistakes in the newspaper that sometimes defy explanation. I've tried really hard to learn how to be more tactful when dealing with readers who have no idea how a newspaper operates. I've learned acceptance — that we may not have always put out the best product possible, but we always put forth our best effort.

And I've learned that you can't please everyone. Maybe that could be re-worded to "There will always be a few people who will never be pleased, no matter what you do."

Inside this organization, the sense of never feeling satisfied comes with the territory, and it's a good thing. I've watched writers, editors, photographers, designers and sales people at the Emerald push themselves to delirium at times because they weren't satisfied and they wanted one last opportunity to tweak a lead, adjust a photo or perfect a graphic.

Simply put, we have one helluva staff of students — and a top-notch group of full-time professionals — working at the Emerald, and I'll miss this place.

Sure, putting in about 40 hours a week at a college newspaper while taking a full load of classes can be a major pain. Especially when some of your readers — the group of people who grade journalists, and rightfully so — tell you that you're barely managing a C-minus.

But I'm not leaving this position

with a heavy psychological load because of the criticism. Of course, I don't turn away others who want to take the heat for a change.

When I hand over the reins to summer editor Andrew Adams, he will be the one taking those complaints about how the Emerald is/has become/always has been (insert carping comment or phrase here). Then when Jessica Blanchard returns in fall 2001 for her go-round as editor in chief, she can answer the readers' angry calls, open their occasional condescending e-mails and engage in that rare face-to-face demand for a retraction or an apology.

Despite all of that, this undertaking has brought about for me a transformation of sorts. Whereas my critics were once damned, I've learned to accept criticism for what it is, and I've learned to just smile and work harder next time.

Maybe Elvis Costello said it best in one of his songs: "Oh I used to be disgusted / and now I try to be amused. / But since their wings have got rusted, / you know, the angels wanna wear my red shoes."

I'm ready to give up the red shoes and I'm ready to graduate from college. But how does a person sum up a year's worth of toil and trouble, as well as genuine laughs and good friendships, all of which has been etched into my memory at the end of this five-year journey to obtain a degree?

Just one more Emerald and four more weeks of classes to go.

And then, it's time for a sigh of contentment.

Jack Clifford is editor in chief (through Monday only) for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at ode@oregon.uoregon.edu. p.s. See ya' later, suckers.

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